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AUTHOR Robinson, Viviane; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in South Auckland, New Zealand, to discover how parents could help children with reading difficulties. Specifically, the study addressed three questions: Do parents want to help improve their children's reading? Can parents learn specific reading tutoring skills? Does parent tutoring improve children's reading, both at home and at school? The study involved 14 families, each with a child between the ages of 8 and 12 who was at least two years behind in reading. The parents were instructed in tutoring procedures that were designed to help children enjoy reading and become independent readers. The results showed that, at home, the tutored children progressed an average of 5.75 months in the level of book they could read, the overall accuracy of their reading improved from 84.5% to 86.6%, and their percentage of self-corrected errors improved from 15.2% to 27.6%. At school, however, only two of the children showed progress. The findings indicated that parents did want to help their children with reading; that parents not only learned the tutoring procedures but, in some cases, used them with other children; and that reading gains in one setting did not automatically transfer to a second setting. (FL)

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Parents as Remedial Reading Tutors: A Report on the Work of the Mangere Home and School Project.

Viviane Robinson, Ted Glynn,
Stuart McNaughton and Marianne Quinn.

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When things go wrong with a child's *school work*, however, professionals are less likely to call on the help of parents. This is probably because they wonder if the parents are interested in helping with problems which are traditionally seen as the responsibility of the school. They may also view parents as unskilled, as likely to make the child more anxious and confused.

Three educational psychologists and a research associate at the University of Auckland, have just spent a year studying how parents can help children with academic (in this case,reading) difficulties.

Fraser Gardyne

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Their research addressed three main questions:

1. Do parents *want* to help their children's reading difficulties?
2. Can parents learn specific reading tutoring skills?
3. Does the parents' tutoring improve the way their child reads, both at home and at school?

These questions were answered in an intensive study of 14 families in South Auckland. Each family had a child between eight and 12 years old who was between 2 years 4 months and five years behind in reading. The families were referred to the *Mangere Home and School Project* by educational psychologists, and were accepted into the project if:

an adult or older sibling was willing to spend 3 sessions per week (about 10-15 minutes per session) tutoring the child;

the family agreed that the sessions could be tape-recorded and that a project director could visit the family twice a week, for the 10-15 weeks of the project;

the class teacher, school principal and parents agreed that samples of the child's reading could also be obtained at school.

the tutor spoke to the child in English;

the child had no vision or hearing problems.

Before training parents in the tutoring procedures we recorded several sessions where parents tutored their child in the manner that seemed most 'natural' to them. They were given appropriate books and asked to try to help their child to read better. This allowed us to discover whether parents can help their children when they are not instructed specifically how to tutor. After all it is possible that just by hearing their children read three times a week progress will be made. Here is a summary of parents' 'natural tutoring style'.

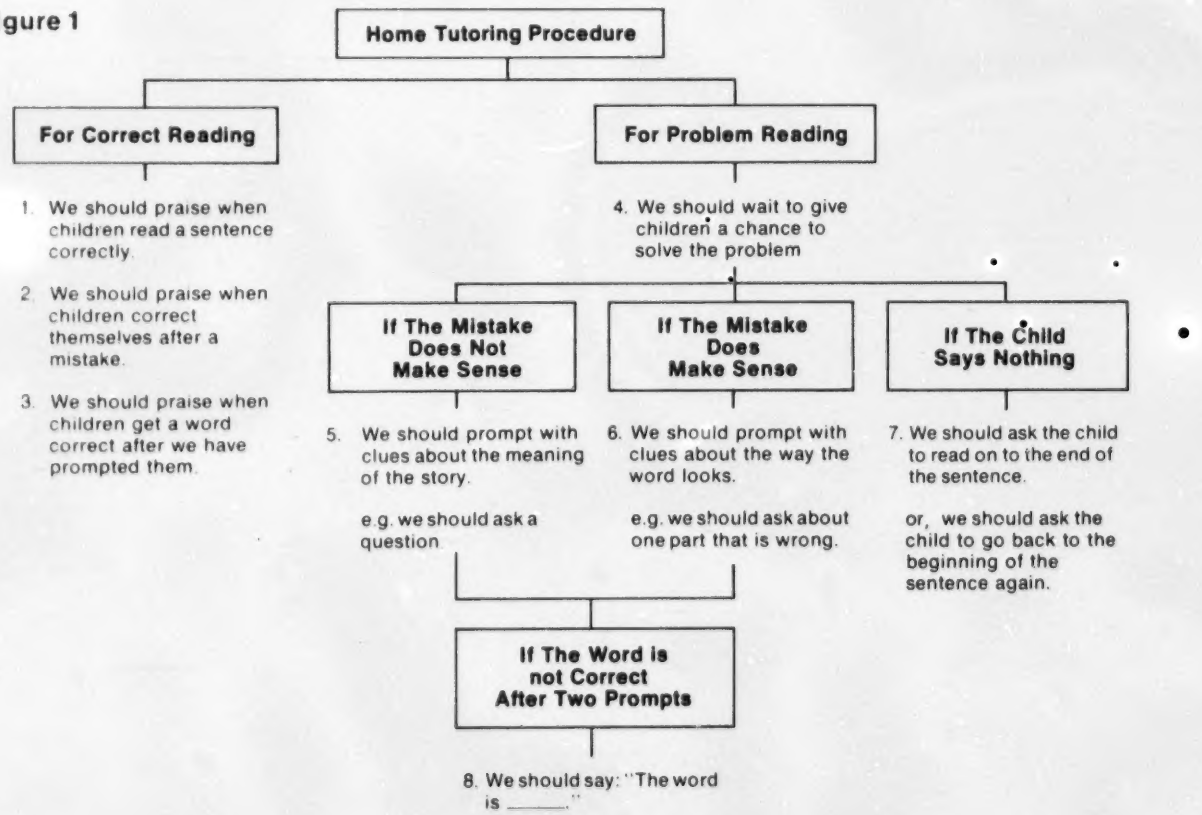
When parents are not trained to tutor they usually:
make few comments about children's good reading, or attempts at problem solving;

jump in, straight after children make a mistake, or get stuck on a word;

help children by telling them the word (provide a model) without showing them how to work it out (for themselves).

The 'natural' or untrained tutoring sessions produced very little improvement in the children's reading. The directors of the project then introduced the tutoring procedures to each family in turn. The sequential introduction of the training allowed us to test whether or not any changes in the child's reading were caused by the use of the procedures.

Figure 1


Home Tutoring Procedure
For Correct Reading
For Problem Reading
1. We should praise when children read a sentence correctly.
2. We should praise when children correct themselves after a mistake.
3. We should praise when children get a word correct after we have prompted them.
4. We should wait to give children a chance to solve the problem
If The Mistake Does Not Make Sense
If The Mistake Does Make Sense
If The Child Says Nothing
5. We should prompt with clues about the meaning of the story.
e.g. we should ask a question
6. We should prompt with clues about the way the word looks.
e.g. we should ask about one part that is wrong.
7. We should ask the child to read on to the end of the sentence.
or, we should ask the child to go back to the beginning of the sentence again.
If The Word is not Correct After Two Prompts
8. We should say: "The word is _____."

The tutoring procedures were designed to help children enjoy reading. They were also to help them to become independent (rather than dependent) readers by solving the words they found difficult. One part of the procedures told parents what to do when their child read well (correct reading); the other part told them what to do when the child had difficulty (problem reading). The procedures are outlined below left:

When parents provide *descriptive praise* (e.g., 'good boy, you corrected yourself there,') they not only make the session more pleasant for both parties, but they tell children what it is they have done right, or nearly right (Statements 1, 2 and 3).

By *pausing* for several seconds after a child makes a mistake parents give children a chance to recognise (often by reading on) that what they have said does not make sense or does not match the text. Very often children will correct the mistake for themselves (Statement 4). Learning to self-correct is an important part of learning to become an independent reader.

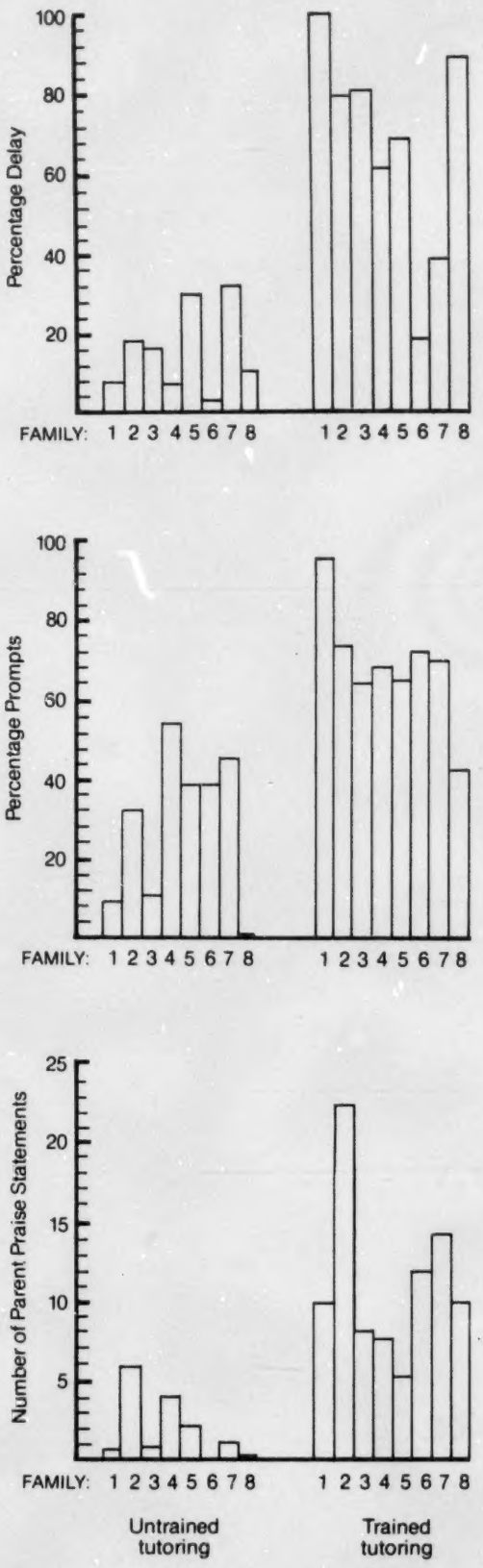
By giving children a *prompt* or *clue*, rather then telling them the word, the tutor is teaching them to problem-solve the word, rather than to rely on the tutor to provide an answer (Statements 5, 6 and 7). Tutors tell the child the word after two prompts, so that the flow of the story is not broken for too long (Statement 8).

The graphs show that parents were able to learn these new tutoring procedures. They shifted from immediate to delayed attention to errors, from providing models to providing prompts, and they significantly increased their number of praise comments per session.

It is important to remember however, that these changes were *achieved within the context of an intensive and flexible training programme.* Each family was visited twice a week during the training phase. At each session the director reviewed the procedures with the parent, discussed the analysis of the previous session's tape-recorded data, observed the parent tutoring the child for 10 minutes and discussed several examples of correct and incorrect tutoring that arose during the observation. In other words, the training comprised discussion of the principles involved in the new procedures, opportunities for practice, individualized feedback, and on-the- spot modelling by the director.

Having shown that parents could learn the tutoring procedures our next question was, 'Do the procedures improve children's reading both at home and at school?' The three major measures of a child's progress were: percent of words read initially correct (accuracy); percent of errors self-corrected; and progress in book level, that is, the graded level of difficulty of the books the child could read with 90% accuracy.

Figure 2 **Changes in Tutor Behaviour Across Untrained and Trained Tutoring Conditions for Eight Families.**



The results that follow describe the progress of our second group of eight families.

1. *Progress at Home.*
Children progressed an average of 5.75 months in book level under trained tutoring condition. The overall accuracy of the children's reading improved from 84.5% to 86.6%, and their percent of errors self-corrected improved from 15.2% to 27.6%. These gains were made despite the reading material becoming increasingly difficult as the training progressed.

2. *Progress at School.*
By taking samples of the children's unassisted reading at school, we could see whether gains made at home were transferred to school. Two of the eight children made rapid progress in book level at school, but for the other six children gains and progress at home were not sufficient to ensure progress at school. Consequently, additional school tutoring was provided for these children, by trained research assistants. When the procedures were used both at home and at school, these six children produced gains at school that paralleled those made at home.

The children's progress at school during the trained tutoring phases of the project can be summarized by saying that in 2.7 months of tutoring they showed an average gain of 8.7 months in the level of book they could read with 90% accuracy (a rate of progress substantially above 'normal' progress).

Conclusions

The project's achievements can be summarised by returning to the three questions.

1. Do parents want to help with their children's academic (reading) difficulties?

The answer to this question is definitely, yes. Our parents were concerned enough to allow researchers into their home twice a week, they took the risk of showing us how they coped with their child's difficulties, and they found the time to regularly tutor their child. In some cases, a successful tutoring programme was established in families despite some combination of financial hardship, employment insecurity, emotional strain in the family and an acute shortage of space.

Parents who appear not to want to help, or to be uninterested in their children's school work, may lack confidence in their own abilities, or may, very often correctly, recognise that they lack the appropriate skills. When professionals provide practical guidelines and individualized help, 'apathetic' parents frequently turn into skilled tutors!

2. Can parents learn specific reading tutoring procedures?

Parents not only learned the procedures, but in some cases, began to use them, quite voluntarily with their other children, or with the children of neighbours or friends. Feedback to parents proved to be important, not only to help parents make the initial shift from their 'natural' tutoring style, but to help them maintain the correct procedures after several weeks of tutoring. In subsequent training programmes we will show parents how to do the 'quality control' on their own tutoring.

3. Does the tutoring improve the child's reading both at home and at school?

The project showed clearly that gains in one setting do not automatically transfer to a second setting. Considerable gains were made by all eight children at home. Although two children showed similar gains at school, the remaining six did not. For these children, the assistance of a school tutor trained in the same procedures was needed to maintain progress, particularly when they were promoted to a new book. The directors are now doing finer analyses of the data to discover more precise relationships between what was done in particular tutoring sessions and the progress of the children at home and at school.

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Further information about the work of the Mangere Home and School Project can be found in

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